

# Study background and key findings



## How the study was carried out

This study's purpose is to frame and analyze policy options for water allocation for consideration by the North Carolina Environmental Review Commission (ERC). Water allocation is a social-ecological system (SES): a system in which humans make purposeful decisions that strongly interact with natural processes. The primary focus is geographically North Carolina and temporally the next fifty years, but the study also looks at larger and smaller scales both geographically and temporally. For example, decisions by local water supply systems about their sources of water, prices for water, connections to other systems, maintenance and repair of their water infrastructure are integral parts of North Carolina's water allocation system. Those are important smaller scale concerns. Similarly, decisions by states with which North Carolina shares borders and by federal agencies affect

state water allocation, as do decisions by private corporations that have no real fixed geography. Those are important larger scale concerns. There are also important short- and long-term temporal scales. But the focus is North Carolina in the next fifty years.

The plan for the study emerged after comments on a series of framing questions were received at several public meetings around the state. The principal investigators and the research team spent hundreds of hours in 2008 meeting with experts and interested parties to understand their concerns and insight into water issues. As a result, the study focused on six current policy areas: the capacity use area program; the interbasin transfer process; the interconnection and regionalization of water systems; water pricing, funding, and institutional capacity; the local and state water supply planning process; and drought response. These are critical components of the water allocation system.